

“Three Moments of Fixed Attention: A Multi-Site Review of ‘Disguise: Masks & Global African Art, Introduction” [exhibition review]

By: [Elizabeth Perrill](#)

Elizabeth Perrill, “Three Moments of Fixed Attention: A Multi-Site Review of ‘Disguise: Masks & Global African Art, Introduction” exhibition review, *African Arts* vol. 50, no. 3, 85.

https://doi.org/10.1162/AFAR_r_00360

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Abstract:

The exhibition "Disguise: Masks and Global African Art" was initially conceived of and installed at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) by the curatorial duo of Pamela McClusky, curator of African and Oceanic Art for SAM, and Erika Dalya Massaquoi, consultant curator. This exhibition, which featured twelve contemporary artists utilizing a range of media—sculpture, photography, installation, performance, video, and more—exemplifies the potential for and necessity that traveling exhibitions adapt to multiple venues. Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 161) hypothesized that, among other things, "place is whatever stable object catches our attention. ... Each pause is time enough to create an image of place that looms large momentarily in our view." For art historians and curators, the place that we fix through objects is often the museum. Thus, the touring exhibition allows us a unique moment to reflect upon construction of place. Following its SAM installation, "Disguise" traveled to the Fowler Museum at UCLA and the Brooklyn Museum. At each additional venue in-house curatorial hands were allowed to augment or edit the exhibition checklist. Each reinstallation incorporated objects from the venue's permanent collection, as well as expanded loans and didactic materials.

Keywords: exhibition review | African art

Article:

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"Disguise," and many other traveling exhibitions, afford us moments to consider the place of each museum in relation to the exhibition, but also to reconsider objects that have long been definers of a particular museum as place. What follows are three reviews of the same exhibition, of "Disguise: Masks and Global African Art," in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Brooklyn. The authors have all written or rewritten their reviews with the somewhat atypical concept of a multireview format in mind. However, each review was written independently to encourage varied interpretations, perceptions, and responses to both "Disguise" and to each museum, the places formed within these moments of attention.